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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000995

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TAGS: IZ KJUS MOPS PGOV PHUM PINS PTER

SUBJECT: U.S. SOLDIERS AND IRAQI POLICE ON THE BEAT

Classified By: A/Pol-Mil Counselor Apar Sidhu for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Discussions with both U.S. military and Iraqi police at a Baghdad police station indicate that Iraqi security forces, with coalition assistance, are progressing and growing in confidence despite inadequate facilities, poor logistical systems, and insufficient arms. Despite these challenges, the police consistently display high morale, and both Iraqi and U.S. personnel claim that cooperation is continually improving operational effectiveness. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Recently, Pol-Mil officers visited an Iraqi police patrol station in Zafaraniya, a majority Shia neighborhood with a sizable Sunni population in southeast Baghdad. Located at the KR-1 Joint Security Site, the station straddles a section of Baghdad's "Sunni-Shia fault line", and provided a good opportunity to assess the initial impact of the revised Baghdad Security Plan.

¶3. (C) A visitor to the station first notices the nearly twenty portraits on the station's entrance wall. These are the faces of the "martyrs," the station's policemen who have been killed while on duty since the fall of Saddam. The station is clean, well organized and busy. Several U.S. military personnel were present, some conducting a briefing in the main assembly room and others working on equipment with Iraqi police mechanics. The Americans appeared at home in the station and very familiar with their Iraqi partners; often communicating in a mix of English, Arabic and hand signals while their interpreters struggled to keep pace. The U.S. advisors live at the station on a four-day rotation cycle, conducting day and night-time patrols with both police and Iraqi Army units.

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Zafaraniya's Challenges  
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¶4. (C) Several Iraqis described their situation and routine. Typically, an Iraqi policeman works for twenty-four hours followed by twenty-four hours off duty. Salaries range from a high of 770,000 Iraqi Dinars (about \$592 USD) per month for a senior patrolman to about 650,000 dinars (about \$455 USD) per month for a junior officer. All complained that their salaries, while good by local standards, were routinely paid late. The station's food was held in low regard, with most officers preferring to bring food from home. The officers said that the station was comprised primarily of Shia but that the Sunni officers at the station were "brothers." They emphasized that sectarian problems did not exist and their morale was high. Most considered their main problem to be the lack of fuel for patrol vehicles, which often required them to borrow fuel from Coalition soldiers.

15. (C) A senior officer named Haider said the area's main security problem was centered near a gas station at the intersection of Al Rashid and Al Zaraa streets. Haider said the last serious roadside bomb attack occurred near there in mid-February, killing two policemen and injuring thirteen, including the station's deputy commander. He showed Pol-Mil officers the remnants of three vehicles destroyed in the attack, adding that a few days later the police, acting on a tip, detained a suspect. This is indicative, he said, of the improved civil cooperation in recent weeks. Previously, civilians rarely assisted police fearing reprisals.

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Keys to Success: Presence and Joint Patrols

16. (C) The local commander, Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed Abdul Razaq, said that the revised Baghdad Security Plan was showing positive results, especially in the reduction of extra-judicial killings. Just returning from a patrol that resulted in the detention of 10 insurgents, he emphasized that evening curfews and joint patrols with Coalition Forces and Iraqi Army units were critical to reducing roadside bomb attacks and sectarian killings. He added that he thought this improved security environment would reduce sectarian tensions.

17. (C) Razaq said that his main issue was a lack of equipment and weapons, especially when compared to the insurgents who normally employ rocket propelled grenades and machine guns against his force that is equipped only with assault rifles and pistols. Despite the challenges, Razaq was optimistic and was pleased with the high-level support he has received,

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mentioning that he was visited by Baghdad's overall commander, Lieutenant General Abbud, the week prior. Razaq also praised the efforts of both his civilian and military Police Training Teams, highlighting the positive effect of them actually living at the station.

18. (C) Since the institution of the revised Baghdad Security Plan both the number of joint Iraqi Army - Police patrols and participation of the Coalition Forces has greatly increased, Razaq asserted. He commented that initially there was some "operational friction" between the police and Iraqi Army units, but those issues had "worked themselves out." Razaq's comments were echoed by the large number of Iraqi police vehicles entering and exiting the station beginning or returning from patrols.

9 (C) Traveling through Zafaraniya streets, Pol-Mil Officers noted the presence of Iraqi police on the streets with both soldiers and police manning several checkpoints. Street life appeared lively with a variety of active businesses and produce stands. Along the patrol route, almost all the children (and some adults) waved or gave the "thumbs up" sign. U.S. soldiers commented that local residents' reaction to them has been much more positive in recent weeks.

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U.S Trainers: Cautious Optimism

110. (C) Members of the U.S. Police Training Team in the station echoed the commander's positive assessment, crediting the increasingly visible security presence with reducing crime, sectarian killings and, most importantly, emplacement of roadside bombs. The soldiers acknowledged that while the quality of Iraqi police is improving, there remains room for improvement in operations planning, logistics, and attention to detail. One soldier stated that often the police run out of fuel because they neglect to accurately forecast their requirements. Almost all of the U.S. soldiers, being at least second tour Iraq veterans, were hesitant to make predictions, but all remarked that the reduction in violence

Zafaraniya and the rest of Karadah was noticeable.

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